

CORNELIUS C. BEEKMAN

A seminar paper for History 407: American Biography

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PREFACE

The first time I visited the Beekman house was on a foggy spring morning several years ago. I walked along quiet, tree-lined streets to the gate in the white picket fence. Fifty feet up the hillside stood a deserted, mustard yellow house of restrained Gothic revival lines. Then up the brick walkway past gnarled grape vines, up the steps onto a trellised porch swathed in climbing rose. I felt compelled to turn the handle and ring the doorbell. No one home, of course, and I unlocked the door and looked about. I suddenly felt like a trespasser in another time.

It seemed entirely plausible that I had been transported back a full half century, and that the inhabitants of the house had perhaps just stepped out to church across the street. Sheet music was draped over the upright piano, a bedside stand was littered with pins, a hairbrush with strands of hair, a bottle of cologne. I grew daring, and opened some of the drawers: combs, half-used tubes of patent medicines, a crushed Shriners cap; sheets and pillowcases still in wrappings from a San Francisco department store; celluloid collars, cufflinks, handkerchiefs.

Through the curtains from Carrie Beekman's bedroom window I could look across the empty, fog-shrouded roadway to the house of Max Müller, the German Jewish proprietor of the New York Store, dry goods a specialty. Just to the west was the spire of First Presbyterian Church, where the bell given by C. C. Beekman a

century ago still rang every Sunday morning. From the window of the Beekmans' own bedroom, past the trumpet vine which climbed through a massive catalpa tree, was the bulk of the overgrown farmhouse of Thomas G. Reames, Beekman's longtime banking partner.

It was the first time for me that the Beekman family seemed real. If some of that sense of reality is conveyed in this paper, I will be pleased. But I think that if you go to Jacksonville on a foggy spring morning, and walk past the catalpa tree and up the steps and ring the doorbell--well, that is real.

An effective opening.

CORNELIUS C. BEEKMAN, 1828-1915

INTRODUCTION

Jacksonville, Oregon, was a small town a century ago when banker and express agent Cornelius C. Beekman built his modest Gothic revival house at the east end of California Street. Four blocks up the street stood the wood frame banking office where he conducted his business, buying gold dust, shipping packages, supplementing his income selling school texts and stationery.

Walking to his office in 1885, Beekman would pass by the residence of his future banking partner, Thomas G. Reames, which adjoined his own house. In the next block was the new Presbyterian Church his family attended; he had contributed money for its construction, bought the bell, paid the the fire insurance. Across from the church stood a small salt box house where he had first lived with his wife Julia after their marriage in 1861.

Beekman's Banking House itself might have seemed shabby, with worn plank floors, a wall littered with maps and broadsides, a counter which had been carved with jackknives by countless impatient customers over the previous quarter of a century.

Cornelius C. Beekman spent sixty years as a small town banker. His home and his business were conducted with great modesty, and even austerity. He never held a major political office, never wrote an article, never attended a university. Yet in 1950, the Portland Oregonian named him one of the state's one hundred most

influential citizens of the past century. His bank was the second established in the Oregon Territory. At his death he was regarded as southern Oregon's most knowledgeable local historian. He was a long-time regent of the University of Oregon, and a chair in Pacific Northwest history at the University, endowed by his daughter Carrie, remembers his interest in history.

This is the story, then, of a wealthy and influential but very modest man who gave every indication of being satisfied with the [?]modestness of his life. He ^{might have pointed?} [could point] with pride to his accomplishments in the business world, in local politics, in church and community affairs--but he rarely did so.

EARLY LIFE: NEW YORK TO CALIFORNIA AND OREGON

The early years of Cornelius C. Beekman are obscure and the information on them contradictory. There is no question that he was born on 27 January 1828 to Benjamin B. and Lydia (Compton) Beekman, but his birthplace is variously given as Middletown, New Jersey, New York City, and Dundee, Yates County, New York; New York City is the most probable location. The Beekman family was of Dutch descent, the patriarch of the family being Maarten Beekman, who emigrated from Holland to the New Amsterdam colony with his wife Susannah in 1638. The family seems to have been centered in Somerset County, New Jersey, by the late eighteenth century, and Middletown was the home of Cornelius C. Beekman's grandparents, Cornelius and Rebecca, and of his own parents. Probably the Beekmans were engaged in agriculture, although the suggestion is a tenuous one. An undated news clipping notes that the "Beekman homestead, which was erected in Middletown, N. J., prior to the revolution, was burned to the ground. Some valuable relics of colonial days were lost."¹

Cornelius's father was a building contractor and a sash and door manufacturer. After his marriage to Lydia Compton in 1827, the couple briefly moved to New York City from New Jersey, following the elder Cornelius who had removed there earlier, and it is likely that Cornelius was born there in 1828. In 1830, Benjamin and Lydia and their son took up residence in the small town of Dundee, in Yates County, New York. Dundee is in the

Finger Lakes region of central New York state, and here Benjamin Beekman carried on his woodworking. Young Cornelius attended the public schools of Yates County, and may have later attended school of some kind in Boston. Under his father's guidance, he was also trained as a carpenter. Despite the fact that he kept up a regular correspondence with his parents and made several extended trips back to Dundee, we know virtually nothing about any siblings except that he had at least two brothers, Abram and Thomas De Witt.² From his own account, life for Cornelius Beekman began in 1850, when he joined the rush of gold seekers for California.

Was there
also a
sister?
[Sister
Lydia,
1 other
brother]
RHE

Beekman left Dundee in 1850 and took passage, probably from New York, to Aspinwall in Panama. In a shipboard letter to his parents in 1859, when he again made the voyage from New York to Panama, he tells of visiting "the forward part of the ship which is called the steerage. There is about 400 there... all huddled together like so many hogs...." He relates that he told his cabinmate that he "can now imagine what I went through when I went to Cal. I had to go in the steerage... because I could not buy a ticket in the cabin...."³

Crossing the isthmus, Beekman shipped on the San Francisco-- in a cabin, this time.⁴ Arriving in San Francisco in the fall of 1850, he immediately found work as a carpenter at wages of \$18 a day, and was later the operator of a restaurant there.⁵

This was
a bit high
even for
gold rush times

By 1852, Beekman had struck forth from the city to the gold fields of northern California, where he mined at Sawyer's Bar on

the Klamath River. He apparently did carpentry work in Yreka, and then again mined on the Klamath at Scott's Bar.⁶ In 1852, his name appears as the secretary of a meeting held at Johnson's Bar on the Scott River; the gathering was to try a Dr. A. Bardt for the theft of gold dust. The meeting continued the next day, but Beekman absented himself. The tribunal recovered the gold and ordered Bardt whipped.⁷

In 1853, Beekman began working for Cram, Rogers & Co., a subsidiary of the Adams Express. Operating out of Yreka, he carried gold dust, parcels, and letters between Yreka, Jacksonville, and Crescent City. In 1856, the express firm failed; by this time, Beekman had settled in Jacksonville, where he began the operation of his own firm, Beekman's Express, between the same points he had traveled for Cram, Rogers & Co. At about the same time, he began dealing in gold dust, an enterprise which soon put him in the banking business.⁸

Beekman spent the next sixty years of his life in Jacksonville, a small gold rush town established in 1852 as Table Rock City. The county seat of Jackson County, Oregon Territory, Jacksonville was a cosmopolitan mining and trading center when Beekman moved there in the mid-1850's. Prosperous in its early years, it was bypassed by the Oregon & California Railroad in 1883 and quickly declined as a trading center. By the time of Beekman's death in 1915, Jacksonville was a sleepy village, local economic activity having long before shifted to nearby Medford. In time, Beekman came to embody some of the attributes of the town

itself in its declining years: an intense pride in the glories of the gold rush past, a defensive attitude toward his avowedly old-fashioned business practices, an assertion that the way things were was the way he had always wanted them to be.

The following three sections of this paper will examine three aspects of C. C. Beekman's life in southern Oregon: his family and church activities, his political involvements, and his business activities. This is followed by a summary of his life and his place in Oregon history.

FAMILY AND CHURCH

As a young bachelor in a Far Western mining camp, C. C. Beekman seems to have been as prone as most such men to while away hours in idle pursuits, despite his later expressions of disapproval for such practices. Writing to his parents in 1859, he says of his friend Mulph, "not one drop of liquor has passed his lips since he left New York which is very gratifying to me.... As for Whiskey and myself I quip there is not much danger on that score." But during seven months of 1856 he had run up a bill with Frank Brown of Jacksonville's El Dorado Saloon of \$234.50 for drinks, cigars, "pool cash", raffle tickets, strawberries, and a cash loan. Brown also writes, in the same year, "Beek if you are in distress, either pecuniary or physical do not fail to call on your American friend for aid & comfort. He is ever ready to receive you & deal out most liberal potations of Schiedam Schnapps."⁹

But how much of this was for liquor?

There are hints here, too, that his financial affairs were not always in the strictest of order.

Presumably, however, Beekman soon made the transition to respectable businessman and made the acquaintance of Julia Elizabeth Hoffman, one of six daughters of William and Caroline Hoffman. Julia Hoffman was born in Attica, Indiana, in 1839, and the Hoffmans had traveled overland on the Oregon and Applegate Trails to Jacksonville in 1853. The family was immediately prominent in local affairs, not least because it included six eligible young ladies.¹⁰

Julia was 21 years of age, Cornelius 33, at the time of their marriage on 29 January 1861. At the time, Beekman received a congratulatory letter from a long-time friend, E. Wadsworth, the Yreka agent for both Beekman's and Wells, Fargo & Co.'s Express:

In these secession times I am happy to find one who is in favor of The Union..... I wish you and Mrs. B a long life of married bliss--and never a thought or wish for secession--no matter how many new States may be added to your domain.¹¹

Cornelius and Julia Beekman probably first lived in a small salt box cabin which still stands at Sixth and California Streets in Jacksonville. Their first child, Benjamin B., was born in 1863, followed by Caroline ("Carrie") in 1865 and Lydia in 1867.¹²

In 1863, Beekman moved his banking and express business from a building at the southeast corner of Third and California

Streets to a new frame structure diagonally across the street. A sandstone vault, put in place by Beekman himself, served to store dust and deposits.¹³ Not until about 1874 did he have a new house constructed, a one-and-a-half story cottage with sparing touches of the Gothic revival in steep gables and flat, railed porches.¹⁴ It was a modest dwelling for a family that was among the wealthiest in southern Oregon.¹⁵

The house was probably constructed not long after the death of the Beekmans' youngest and favorite child, Lydia, who succumbed to complications arising from measles. Among the few personal documents of the family's early years which illustrate their domestic life are two letters written to Dundee on the occasion of Lydia's death on the 22nd of October, 1873. That from C. C. Beekman, dated 15 November, relates, "We have met with a terrible affliction in the death of our dear child Lydia.... I never before felt that her death should bring such agonizing pangs." An accompanying letter from his wife Julia is of a more religious cast, but also displays intense emotion. She concludes, "I will enclose for you a lock of our little Lydias hair, this is all we have left of our precious child."¹⁶

Son Benjamin was educated in local schools, and graduated from the University of Oregon in 1884; three years later he received his M.A. In 1888, he was awarded a Bachelor of Laws degree from Yale Law School and entered practice in Portland the next year with Watson, Hume and Watson. From 1907 to 1915 he was on the University of Oregon law faculty in Portland. He retired

from practice about 1917 to administer his father's estate, and also to devote time to his many other interests. A great joiner, he was an active Mason, a member of the Sons of the American Revolution, a charter member and director of the Oregon Historical Society, a charter member and president of the University Club, and active in state Republican Party politics and the Multnomah Athletic Club. A lifelong bachelor, he lived for several decades at the Portland Hotel.¹⁷

Daughter Carrie led a quieter life, but she, too, received an education in local schools. She then attended Mills Seminary in Oakland, California, for several years, where she proved adept at French and music. On returning to Jacksonville, she lived at the family home and gave music lessons; the house was amply provided with piano, organ, and a Victrola. C. C. Beekman specifically willed her "my piano" at his demise; Carrie's own obituary in 1959 noted that "during the time when records were nearly non-existent in the west, Miss Beekman had a collection of some of the finest music that had been recorded." Carrie, like Ben, did not marry, and after the death of her mother in 1931, she too moved to the Portland Hotel.¹⁸

C. C. Beekman seems to have shown a great deal of trust in his children. When Benjamin was in San Francisco in 1885, for instance, apparently in pursuit of further education, his father reminds him that he has "a carte blanc letter of credit" on his father's Wells, Fargo account; Carrie was similarly trusted on her excursions.¹⁹

Julia Beekman is a somewhat pale figure in existing family materials. According to local legend, she made trips to San Francisco twice a year to buy "clothing and spices." Her cook-books hint that she enjoyed this aspect of homemaking. The family seems usually to have had a servant, perhaps more than one. A Chinese, Yan, appears in family records; while in Dundee, Beekman is informed that "everything about your residence looks neat & safe under the efficient care of Yan."²⁰

Julia Beekman was, however, a devoted and long-time member of the Jacksonville Presbyterian Church, a cause in which she enlisted Cornelius with some effect. The Hoffman family had long been associated with the Presbyterian Church, and Julia joined in 1871.²¹

In 1880, C. C. Beekman became chairman of the committee to raise funds for the construction of a new church building, a task which was accomplished in 1881. C. C. Beekman contributed to the building fund, purchased the bell, and, until his death, regularly paid the fire insurance premiums.²²

He made contributions to other congregations as well. In 1835, he donated two lots in the city of Medford to their fledgling Presbyterian church. The next year, he received a letter from William H. Tracy, pastor of the Presbyterian Church of his home town of Dundee, New York. Tracy did not know Beekman, who had left Dundee three dozen years earlier, and it took him thirteen circumspect pages to ask him for a small contribution toward the \$1600 the congregation needed to begin construction of a new building. Apparently Beekman sent more than a token amount, for a month later the astonished Tracy wrote that he "could scarcely

credit his senses" that he had received from this unknown member of the Beekman family an amount which more than met the congregation's entire needs. In 1890, ^{Beekman} ~~he~~ donated property in Medford to the Episcopal church for a new building. Despite all this outward attention to matters religious, Beekman never did join the church.²³

In his funeral address for Cornelius Beekman, the Rev. Weston F. Shields tried to explain why he had never joined the congregation. He noted Beekman's steadfast attendance at church services, the many conversations he had had with him on religious subjects, his devotion to the principles of Masonry, the fact that he had held church offices "all his life," and his long and close friendship with the Rev. Moses A. Williams and Rev. Robert Ennis, former pastors of the Jacksonville church. Shields felt that Beekman honestly believed that he might not "live as a Christian ought to live, and he disdained the appearance of hypocrisy."²⁴

The question then arises, Did Beekman have good reason to believe that it would be "hypocritical" for him to join the church? There is little to hint at it unless one goes back to his bachelor days of pool and schnappes. One anecdote, ^{written?} ~~penned~~ many years after the event by a man who was once doubtless a child terror, Pinto Colvig, does suggest an immoderate attachment to beer. Although in all probability exaggerated, the account is worth quoting:

And that day Fabian Eckelson and I were collecting gunny sacks and beer bottles for extra spending money. Looking over Beek's high board fence.....
EUREKA! A veritable bonanza! Piles and piles of

empty bottles. We ran lickety-split down town where Beek was standing in front of his bank discussing (probably "the evils of drink") with his pastor, Preacher Ennis; and shouted excitedly: "Hey, Mister Beekman - kin we have all 'those empty beer bottles in your backyard?" Rev. Ennis looked astounded. Old Beek, greatly embarrassed, brushed us off. So----- (under our breath)... we called him an old cheapskate, and beat it. Beek told you [William M. Colvig, Pinto's father] about it; and next day I had to apologize to him: --- which he accepted pleasantly; --- but with this admonition: "Very good, Young Man. But in the future remember to hold thy tongue; and to respect the cloth;" It took me a long time to figure that one out.²⁵

The story bears out Beekman's concern for appearances, but it may also hint at a reason for his feelings of Christian unworthiness. It seems clear that Beekman took his religion seriously, and that he led a life that was widely regarded as a model of probity.

Beekman was obviously acutely conscious that there were differences between what he saw as the ideal, morally upright Christian life, and his own failings, small though they might seem to others. Given the other facts of his life, one can only conclude that he genuinely felt that he was somehow "unworthy," that he "might not live as a Christian ought to live," as he stated to his pastor shortly before his death. If this reading is correct, it is interesting to note similar differences which will appear in other aspects of his life: a genuine feeling of inadequacy to the tasks for which others thought him to be well suited.

POLITICAL AFFAIRS

Unless his one-day stint as secretary of a vigilance committee in 1856 can be construed as political activity, C. C. Beekman seems to have shown little interest in politics before 1860. He considered himself a Democrat before that year, when, opposed to slavery, he became a Republican. The same year, he held the office of street commissioner for the newly-incorporated town of Jacksonville. He was elected a member of the Jacksonville school board in 1869 and served on it for many years, although the exact terms of his service have not been determined. He was at various times elected to the Jacksonville town council, but again the records are incomplete; he also served as the town's mayor during 1874-1875. ²⁶

In more partisan politics, Beekman at first kept a low profile. In 1869, he was selected as a delegate to the Republican national convention at St. Louis, but there is no indication that he in fact attended it. ^{26a} In 1878, however, he was rather suddenly tossed from the parochial world of local school trustee to ^{become} the Republican candidate for governor of Oregon.

He was not a willing candidate. On April 9, little more than a week before the Republicans convened in Salem, Beekman had written to the Jacksonville Oregon Sentinel a terse statement of his non-candidacy:

Learning that my name is being mentioned throughout the State in connection with the Governorship I desire to say that I am not a candidate for that or any other position.

I am not a politician in any acceptation of the term, have never occupied official place except in a limited local sphere, and prefer the position of a private citizen to any in the gift of the people of Oregon....²⁷

It was no easy matter for the Republicans to select a suitable candidate in 1878. When the Republicans convened on April 18, the first ballot for governor included D. P. Thompson, Henry Failing, L. L. Rowland, and J. W. Watts, who badly split the 176 votes cast; two, however, were cast for the unnominated C. C. Beekman. At the fourth ballot, Beekman was officially nominated by Nathaniel Langell of Josephine County, but not until much jockeying and withdrawing of names had occurred did he poll, on the eighth ballot, 99 votes to receive the convention's endorsement. The lengthy squabbling was put behind with a subsequent resolution to make Beekman's selection unanimous.²⁸

Despite his earlier protestations, Beekman immediately wired the convention:

I accept the nomination so unexpectedly conferred upon me. I appreciate the unsought honor, and if elected, will endeavor to fulfill the duties of the position so as to earn and merit the title of governor from all persons and parties, independent of all political or sectional combinations, thoughtful only of the best interests of the whole people. I pledge myself, if chosen, to conduct the affairs of the state with the same care and scrupulous economy that would govern my own private business.²⁹

Jacksonville indulged in festivities over this turn of events, for the town could boast of having both a candidate for governor and, on the Democratic slate, a candidate for secretary of state in Thomas G. Reames, Beekman's neighbor.

At about 10:30 PM last Wednesday our citizens were startled from their sleep by the report of guns fired in honor of Mr. Beekman's nomination for Governor. In a few minutes a large crowd of that gentleman's friends, irrespective of party[,] had gathered and proceeded with the brass band to his residence. Mr. Beekman had retired to rest but hastily dressing himself he made his appearance and... responded in his peculiarly tense and pointed way.... After three rousing cheers for the nominee the crowd went to the residence of Mr T.G. Reames... and showed their appreciation by serenading him also.... [E]veryone went home feeling that Jacksonville had its full share of honor at the hands of the rival State convention[^s].³⁰

Not all ~~was~~ ^{serene} on the political horizon, however, although it does seem to have been difficult for the Democrats to find any substantial mud to sling at Beekman. During the campaign, the only major issue--one which backfired against the Democrats--was that of "swamp land."

Oregon has had its full share of government land frauds, and the swamp lands affair was only one of many. An act of Congress in 1860 extended the granting of land for the reclamation of overflow lands--first applied in Louisiana and Arkansas--to Minnesota and Oregon. The state of Oregon did not comply with the terms of the act until 1870, when the legislature was "befoozled" into passing an enabling act under which a single individual could purchase an unlimited amount of "such lands as amenable state agents could be induced to designate as swamp lands"; the final cost was \$1 per acre. The swamp lands so located were mostly in the south central part of the state in what are today Klamath and Lake Counties. The law was laxly

written and administered and abuses were frequent; "a single party--the tool of foreign capitalists--received a deed to at least 350,000 acres."³¹

A hint that this might become an issue appeared even before Beekman's nomination. A letter from "A Republican Settler" at Merganser, Lake County, appeared in the Oregonian of 10 April 1878:

Mr. Beekman has been speculating quite extensively in swamp land bonds and it is generally understood that he owns quite a large tract of swamp land, and the settlers here consider him their enemy.

Two weeks later there was a reply from "A Fair Democrat":

I see the Democrats are beginning to attack Mr. Beekman because he owns a small tract of swamp land. Now I don't belong to his party, but a true Democrat likes fair play, and I want to know why there is nothing said about W. W. Thayer and T. G. Reames, candidates on our state ticket, and both big swamp land owners? Thayer was also a zealous advocate for the state in swamp land cases.³²

It came out during the brief campaign that C. C. Beekman had, indeed, filed for some 5,000 acres in the Langell Valley of Klamath County. He had in fact acquired only 3,000 acres of the 5,000 filed on, and he owned only a one-third interest in that. Much to the dismay of the Democrats, tying Beekman to the swamp land frauds not only tainted T. G. Reames, but also brought forth the information that their gubernatorial candidate, W. W. Thayer, had applied for 100,000 acres of swamp land. The Democrats weakly countered that Thayer had assigned his swamp land interests to one H. C. Owen in 1875; the Republicans retorted that Owen was "the most notorious 'swamper' in Oregon"

and implied that this was only a ploy, that Thayer would get his lands back after the election.³³ The issue fizzled.

The campaign was otherwise characterized only by a few Oregon-style attacks on Beekman as a miserly banker who exploited the poor, as a "Jew", as a "Methodist", as being too businesslike. They were poor issues. Beekman himself engaged in virtually no serious campaigning aside from a two-minute speech at a Portland hotel in which he merely repeated the sentiments of his telegram accepting the nomination.³⁴

The Portland papers, however, missed reporting one other impromptu campaign appearance during his visit there. The men of Portland's Fire Company No. 1 were having a beery reunion when some of them realized that the candidate for governor was in town, and that perhaps they should have him over for a speech. Beekman was fetched from his hotel, unaware of the character of the group he was to address. Arriving with Silas Day of Jacksonville, a county judge* and a staunch Democrat, Beekman made a speech from a table top. From the back of the room, someone shouted, "Hurrah for Thayer!"

"Beek" immediately took his cue, and said, "My friend over there can't set me back by any hurrahing for Thayer, who is a friend of mine, and an elegant gentleman with whom I have done business. If I am beaten I want it to be done by just such a man as Thayer, and I don't mind giving three cheers for him myself.

Beekman promptly did so, and was given three cheers "and a tiger" himself in return.³⁵

* The term "judge" is exactly synonymous with the present "commissioner."

The election was held on June 4, but it was nearly two weeks before the outcome of the governor's race was known. Poor weather apparently hampered communications with parts of southern and eastern Oregon. On June 10, the Oregonian proclaimed that there was "scarcely a doubt" that Beekman had won the election; four days later, it looked like Thayer had won; by the 17th, the paper announced that "Thayer is elected governor by a majority of 41 votes." During the weeks of uncertainty, Julia and Carrie Beekman, so the legend goes, were sufficiently sure of Beekman's election that they began planning a new wardrobe for Salem society.³⁶ Given C. C. Beekman's inclination to be anything but excitable, it is likely that he merely waited patiently for the returns to come in from Lake County--the last to report--before he made any move. Although Beekman was leading until that time by well over a hundred votes, Lake County went for Thayer by 176 votes.³⁷

The official tally gives Thayer a winning margin of 61 votes; over the years, biographers of Beekman have variously reported the difference as 41, 49, and 69 votes, but clearly the margin was small, and clearly Lake County made the crucial difference. Whether or not the vote there was in some way tied to the swamp land controversy is unclear.

True to his fire hall cheers in Portland, Beekman penned Thayer a congratulatory letter:

Please accept my sincere congratulations on your success assured by the latest and final returns. I have not the slightest regret at being relieved

from so grave and unprofitable a responsibility, but feel that the position will be creditably filled. Had the democracy throughout the state felt as many of your friends did here I think it more than probable that had you not been chosen Governor you would have been selected for a more exalted position.³⁸

Beekman had not wanted or sought statewide office, but several times in succeeding years he was again solicited to run for governor. He was approached in 1882, only to respond that he was "not an aspirant for any office and if I were I know but little of the methods by which office is obtained." He asserted that if the choice were, however, to "again fall upon me" "I would hardly feel at liberty to decline it."³⁹ Yet again, in 1894, while visiting his family in Dundee, New York, Beekman received telegrams from his son Benjamin and from J. A. Boyer of Jacksonville asking if he would accept the candidacy if it were offered. Again, his response was deferential: he would, but he would rather not.⁴⁰

Beekman was not a political man: his every act and word proclaims his awareness of the gravity and responsibility of political office, and his belief that he did not himself measure up to his own standards for political officeholders. It is unlikely that he believed that those in office were better men than he, but he felt they should be so. His attitude here is analagous to the one he held toward church membership: he was not fit, not worthy.

BUSINESS AFFAIRS

C. C. Beekman dabbled in so many business affairs over the years, the records of which are scattered in different depositories or lost, that many of his interests can only be suggested. He was an expressman and stagecoach agent; he traded in gold dust; he was a banker; he sold school books and pencils; he dealt in real estate and county warrants; he invested in mining operations. It is impossible to say what part of his various trades occupied the most of his time and energy, or which proved the most financially rewarding. Very likely his bank was closest to his heart, although it may not have been his most profitable venture.

Beekman first went into business for himself after Cram, Rogers failed in 1856, when he established Beekman's Express between Yreka and Jacksonville. Wells, Fargo & Company, operating over the lines of the California Stage Company south of Yreka, offered connecting express service to San Francisco. In 1858, Beekman signed a contract with California Stage, being then described as a "banker and express carrier" who was "engaged in transmitting... divers and sundry packages and parcels of Gold Dust, Gold bullion, gold & silver coin, letters, parcels and packages" which the company transported for him. It is unclear whether this contract included service as far north as Jacksonville. Not until 1860 is there regular stagecoach service through Jacksonville, when the California & Oregon Stage Company began operating between Sacramento and Portland. C. C. Beekman was appointed Jacksonville agent for the stage company in 1860, and

probably thereafter operated his express business entirely on the stages. Wells, Fargo began operating over the C&O line in 1863, when Beekman discontinued his express and was appointed Wells, Fargo agent for Jacksonville.⁴¹

Beekman himself was unsure of just when he began doing business as "a banker," the usual date being given as 1856 or 1857. The transition from expressman to banker began with Beekman undertaking to store gold dust for miners who were accumulating a shipment for the mint; for this service, Beekman charged the sum of 1 per cent of the value of the dust per month. His usual charge for carrying the dust was 5 per cent of the value. As early as 1856, when Beekman himself was still often on the road with his express business, he had an office in Jacksonville which was manned by U. S. Hayden. Beekman himself said that "almost without any intention of doing so I was operating a private bank."⁴² In part this was the result of extending his activities as express agent and safekeeper of gold dust to actually buying dust from miners and shipping it to the mint on his own account.

The earliest account by Beekman of his banking operations is found in a letter he wrote in 1865 to J. T. Raplee, probably at Dundee, New York.

As for business I am Agent for Wells Fargo & Co. Express at this place, and also Agt for the Cal Stage Co. which pays me about \$2000-per year in coin. I am besides banking on my own hook, the only Banker in this section. I do a business of about \$300000-per year. You perhaps would call

the business that of a Broker. It consists principally in selling Exchange on San Francisco, buying & selling of Gold Dust and L. T. [legal tender] Notes, loaning money etc.

We do not do a discount and deposit business, nor issue bills. I keep one Clerk who I pay \$1000-per year (coin)⁴³ We do all kinds of business upon a coin basis....

Beekman's records indicate an extensive business in shipping dust to the mint, where his orders would read, "Please coin and deposit proceeds to my account." Much of his business was done through Wells, Fargo's banking operations, and here he had a close personal friend in E. Wadsworth. Wadsworth, who had known Beekman since the '50's, had once been Yreka express agent and subsequently became an official with Wells, Fargo in their San Francisco offices. Beekman frequently corresponded with Wadsworth on financial matters. In addition, he visited Wadsworth socially on his frequent trips to San Francisco, and acted as agent for Wadsworth's property holdings in Jackson County. ⁴⁴

Fletcher Linn, La nephew of C. C. Beekman, recounts another story of Beekman's financial dealings and strategy.

On my near last visit with him, we had a particularly long chat and he gave me an interesting account of his own first real investment. He stated that he had saved \$3,000 and wanted to get it working, so he took it with him on one of his trips to San Francisco... to see if the officers at Wells, Fargo and Co. would invest it for him....

The agent... asked him if he had tried to buy Jackson County warrants, when available. Mr. Beekman answered "O Yes, I can buy any quantity of them, but they are no good, and are selling as low as sixty five or seventy cents on the dollar."

The agent then asked him, "What interest they paid?", and he answered "8 percent." The Agent then hastily replied: "Man, go back to Jacksonville with your \$3,000 and buy all the Jackson County warrants you can get; and what you can't handle, buy for us.... [D]on't you know that the whole of Jackson County... is security for those warrants?"

Then Uncle "Beek" turned to me with a smile, and said: "That's really how I got my start"; and smiling more broadly he added: "That's when I found the best "Gold Mine" in Southern Oregon, and all I had to do was to let the other fellows do the digging."⁴⁵

In issuing warrants Jackson County committed itself to exchanging land, if necessary, to redeem the warrants if tax money was not forthcoming. In this way, and through loaning cash secured by land, Beekman acquired a good deal of real estate. He does not seem to have held onto any great amount of it, but to have sold it; it was undoubtedly a profitable sideline.⁴⁶

*The land was used
for planting of
melons and might
be used for farming*

Besides buying gold that others had mined, Beekman himself⁴⁷ invested in several mining ventures. They do not seem to have been financially successful. In 1875, he built a steam stamp mill on the Applegate River west of Jacksonville, but after a few weeks, mention of it disappears from the newspapers. In 1878, he was associated in a partnership with U. S. Hayden to develop a hydraulic operation which was to require a ditch of 22 miles to provide a reliable head of water. During 1893 and 1894 he set J. A. Huffer to building a mill and developing a shaft on Jackson Creek. Although the mill was put into operation and some gold was removed, this project, too, came to a halt.⁴⁷

In many ways, Beekman's Bank never advanced beyond the primitive banking arrangements that were begun in the 1850's, and Beekman himself seems to have delighted in this fact. His legendary distaste for checks is confirmed in Pinto Colvig's anecdote, written for his father, of a visit to Beekman's in the early 1900's.

I recall the time when you were in a hurry to leave on a business trip. Started to write a check and Old Beek handed you ten 20-dollar gold pieces from his pocket purse, saying: "here, Bill--we'll straighten it out when you come home. Those damn checks are a nuisance. Makes too much bookkeeping."⁴⁸

The "damn" is probably Pinto's adjective, not Beek's, but the substance of the story is sound.

Apparently, too, Beekman never abandoned his practice of considering every deposit to be separate and inviolable: whatever was deposited in Beekman's Bank was in effect in a safe deposit box, stashed in his sandstone vault. Depositor's money was never risked by being loaned; Beekman made loans from his own funds, not from his depositors' monies. Fletcher Linn gives a colorful account of the practice:

His bank was of course a unique institution.... When a person came in to make a deposit..., he'd merely hand him a little bag with a name-tag attached to it, and request the depositor to sign his name and address on the tag; then put his money or gold-dust into it, and tie up the bag. There was no book-keeping, no checks issued or to be bothered with....

....Had there been a "run" on the bank, every depositor would have received his own little bag, with his name and address written by himself upon it, and with no loss to anybody.⁴⁹

In later years, indeed, he did permit the use of checks, and through his connections with Wells, Fargo he offered such services as foreign drafts and letters of credit. The bank weathered every national financial crisis without a suspicion of unsoundness; Beekman apparently loaned funds to other banks during several panic years.⁵⁰

For all the seeming bucolicness of the operation, Beekman was, as Orin Burrell notes, "not just a small town banker," but a man of financial probity who enjoyed the confidence and trust of the giant Wells, Fargo empire. In the 1890's he was considered for the presidency of the Commercial National Bank of Portland. Beekman held an interest in the Commercial National, which was originally controlled by Wells, Fargo, and which was later to become part of the United States National Bank of Portland.⁵¹ Although he delighted in operating a personal banking house of antiquarian charm, Beekman was apparently judged to be well acquainted with financial affairs, and was offered a position reflecting that judgment. But, as in religious and political affairs, he elected not to accept the responsibilities he could have grasped.

SUMMARY AND POSTSCRIPT

If there is a theme in this life, it is that Cornelius C. Beekman never judged himself to be as capable as others thought him to be, or as capable as he probably was. He steadfastly maintained a modesty and self-effacement that was very real.

Some of the sharpest pictures of Cornelius Beekman come to us through interviews ~~done~~ with him in the last few years of his life. They show him displaying a mixture of nostalgia and thankfulness and self-justification. He was a charter member and first president of the Southern Oregon Pioneer Association, and, as his eulogy by the Association read in 1915, "he never tired of telling of pioneer experiences."⁵² To Fred Lockley, interviewing him for the Oregon Journal in 1912, "Entering Beekman's bank one is carried back from the era of automobiles and aeroplanes to the days of the stage coach and the pack train." The walls announce stages to California, stages which have not run in a quarter of a century. Beekman proudly relates to Lockley:

Frequently strangers bustle in here, glance at the old register of passengers or the old Wells Fargo records, see the old signs and the worn furniture and think they have gotten in the wrong place and that this is not a bank, but they are newcomers--strangers. What they think doesn't matter. I neither solicit nor desire their custom. Many of my customers have been on my books for more than 50 years and yet if they were asked to, they could not fill out a check.⁵³

To his pastor, the Rev. Shields, Beekman remarked, "I will soon be 87 years old. We old pioneers are dropping off one by one. There are not many of us left. We have been satisfied with this life and now we are anxious about what is beyond. I have no complaint to make; for God has been good to me and mine."⁵⁴

It is difficult to make an assessment of a life which gave so much, but could have given more. In his preoccupation with the

past, an interest which he passed on to his son and daughter, C. C. Beekman may have given us more than he did in his lifetime. To local history, Benjamin Beekman gave years of service to the board of the Oregon Historical Society; at his death, he willed the Beekman Bank and its contents to the Society as a memorial to pioneer banking. Carrie Beekman, in addition to bequeathing a sum to the University of Oregon for the teaching of Northwest history, willed the family's house and furnishings to the University. Eventually it too was preserved as a remarkable example of nineteenth century domestic life.

Is there no tangible evidence of what these years of service entailed?

The experience of walking into C. C. Beekman's shabby, plank-floored bank with its shining memories, of strolling up California Street past the house where he first lived with Julia after their marriage, past the church he helped to build, past Thomas Reames's gawky farmhouse, up the steps in into the Beekman's front parlor can, more than any narrative, give one a feeling that C. C. Beekman could, perhaps, have done more with his life. Maybe we should be happy that he didn't, certainly he was.

Why?

Richard, this is a highly competent piece of work. You have rooted out the sources and used them intelligently. Still, C. C. Beekman remains elusive, an enigma to the last.

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NOTES

Basic biographical information on Cornelius C. Beekman is to be found in Winfield Scott Downs, ed., Encyclopedia of Northwest Biography, pp. 3-6, and in the Portrait and Biographical Record of Western Oregon, pp. 207-208.

In the notes, OHS refers to the Oregon Historical Society, Portland; SOHS to the Southern Oregon Historical Society, Jacksonville; and UO to the University of Oregon, Special Collections, Eugene.

1. Information on the Beekman family's Dutch antecedents, in Downs, p. 4, apparently derives from a report with the Beekman papers, OHS MS 916, Box 15; the clipping on the Beekman homestead is in Beekman papers, SOHS MS 134.

There is no apparent connection between the Maarten Beekman family and the New York commercial dynasty which descends from William Beekman, who arrived in New Netherland in 1647; the family is extensively chronicled in Philip L. White, The Beekmans of New York in Politics and Commerce, 1647-1877 (New York: New-York Historical Society, 1956). The question was raised, however: E. N. Sheppard in behalf of James William Beekman wrote to C. C. Beekman 20 July 1893, from New York City; "Have [you] never found out anything definite about the origin of your family, or its connection with the Beekman family of New York City?" Beekman papers, UO MS Ax 10.
2. In Beekman papers, OHS MS 916, Box 15, are some lessons from a Boston night school, 1845, ascribed to C. C. Beekman; in Beekman papers, SOHS MS 134, is a letter from Beekman to his mother, 14 April 1881, which mentions "the boys," "Abe John and Dewit"; in Beekman papers, OHS MS 916, Box 18, a summons and complaint, Murray v. Beekman et al., 3 April 1906, names Abram and Thomas DeWitt Beekman; in Beekman papers, UO MS Ax 10, is a clipping from the Dundee (N. Y.) Observer, 26 Nov. 1925, on the death of T. DeWitt Beekman, son of and "last member of the family of the late Benjamin Beekman."
3. C. C. Beekman to his parents, 13 Aug. 1859, "At Sea, Steam Ship Moses Taylor," in Beekman papers, SOHS MS 134.
4. Ibid.; however, one account has him arriving on a junk: "Address delivered by Rev. Weston F. Shields at the funeral of Cornelius C. Beekman," in Beekman papers, OHS MS 916, Box 15.
5. Southern Oregon Pioneer Association, SOHS unarranged MS, "A memorial of the life of Cornelius C. Beekman," 1915.
6. Ibid.; also, Downs, p. 4.
7. San Francisco Alta California, 21 March 1852, in Mae Hélène Bacon Boggs, My Playhouse Was a Concord Coach, p. 122; Downs, p. 4, also states that at Yreka Beekman "serve[d]" as attorney

for three miners before the miners' court. In these three cases he won the verdict...." The episode is not mentioned elsewhere.

8. Downs, p. 4; Portrait and Biographical Record, p. 207.
9. C. C. Beekman to his parents, 13 Aug. 1859, in Beekman papers, SOHS MS 134; receipted bill, Frank Brown to C. C. Beekman, 25 Jan. to 15 Sept. 1856, and note, Brown to Beekman, 23 April 1856, both in Beekman papers, OHS MS 916, Box 10.
10. Medford (Or.) Daily News, 29 July 1931, obituary of Julia E. Beekman, in SOHS clipping files, Beekman family.
11. E. Wadsworth, Yreka, Calif., to Beekman, 30 Jan. 1861, in Beekman papers, OHS MS 916, Box 11.
12. Gail E. H. Evans, Jacksonville Survey, p. 197; SOHS clipping files, Beekman family.
13. Evans, pp. 33-34; Vance DeBar ("Pinto") Colvig, "Clowns is People," unpublished mss in Colvig papers, SOHS MS 9, p. 15. That Beekman built the vault himself may be only local legend.
14. Evans, pp. 196-199.
15. Ibid.; Evans, p. 34, notes that Beekman's annual income was the highest in Jacksonville ca. 1868; Jacksonville Reveille, 4 July 1868.
16. C. C. and Julia E. Beekman to Benjamin and Lydia Beekman, Dundee, N. Y., 15 Nov. 1873, in Beekman papers, SOHS MS 134.
17. Downs, pp. 5-6.
18. Carrie's report cards from Mills, 1883-1885, are in Beekman papers, UO MS Ax 10; her proficiency in French and music are mentioned in a letter from Julia Beekman to "My Dear Sister," 21 April 1884, in Beekman papers, SOHS MS 134. Obituaries appear in the Portland Oregonian, 13 July 1959, and the Medford Mail Tribune, 14 July 1959. A copy of C. C. Beekman's will is in the Beekman papers, OHS MS 916, Box 17.
19. Orin K. Burrell, Gold in the Woodpile, p. 221. Burrell's article on the Beekman Bank in this work, "The Bank That Never Made a Loan," is based on the Beekman papers at UO.
20. SOHS clipping files, Beekman family; the cookbooks are in Beekman papers, UO MS Ax10; Robert Ennis to C. C. Beekman, Dundee, N. Y., 21 Nov. 1891, in Beekman papers, UO MS Ax10.
21. Medford Daily News, 29 July 1931.
22. Cost of the church and details of Beekman's contributions are in Beekman papers, UO MS Ax10; mention of the bell is in SOHS clipping files, Beekman family and Jacksonville Presbyterian Church; insurance records are in Beekman papers, OHS MS 916, Box 15.

23. Beulah Warner, "History of the First Presbyterian Church of Medford, Oregon," p. 3; Wm. H. Tracy to C. C. Beekman, 20 March and 27 April 1886, in Beekman papers, UO MS Ax10; Robert DeVoe, "History of the Episcopal Church in the Medford Area," p. 5.
24. "Address delivered by Rev. Weston F. Shields," Beekman papers, OHS MS 916, Box 15.
25. Colvig, "Clowns is People," SOHS MS 9, p. 16.
26. Downs, p. 5. As street commissioner, see Evans, p. 34; oddly, the minutes of the Jacksonville Board of Trustees, 1860-1864, are in the Beekman papers, OHS MS 916, Box 5. For his election to the school board, Oregon Sentinel, 10 April 1869. At SOHS is an incomplete compendium, "Officers and Officials of Jackson County, Jacksonville, and Medford, ca. 1852-1968"; Beekman appears as mayor, 1874-1875, but does not appear on the council list. However, the list is blank for 1856-1903, 1905-1911, and 1913-1915, when Beekman could have been on the council.
- 26a. Oregon Sentinel, 25 Sept. 1869.
27. Oregon Sentinel, 10 April 1878.
28. Oregonian, 18 April 1878.
29. Oregonian, 19 April 1878.
30. Oregon Sentinel, 24 April 1878.
31. Frederick George Young, "The Financial History of the State of Oregon," Oregon Historical Society Quarterly, vol. 10, no. 4 (Dec. 1909), pp. 378-384 and vol. 11, no. 2 (June 1910), pp. 154-159.
32. Oregonian, 30 April 1878; the letter is headed Linkville [Klamath Falls], 24 April.
33. See especially Oregon Sentinel, 1 May 1878, reprinted in the Oregonian 4 May; an article from the Yreka (Calif.) Journal reprinted in the Oregonian 30 April and the Oregon Sentinel 8 May; and Oregon Sentinel, 22 May.
34. Both the Oregonian and the Oregon Sentinel published frequent short notices during the campaign, often remarks from other newspapers followed by an editorial reply or comment. The two-minute speech is reported in the Oregonian, 9 May 1878.
35. The story, in the Oregon Sentinel, 29 May 1878, is credited to the Salem Record.
36. The wardrobe story is in an undated clipping, a letter to the editor of the Oregonian from Helen Colvig Cook, in SOHS clipping files, Beekman family.
37. As reported in the Oregon Sentinel, 19 June 1878. Newspaper tallies of the vote vary; the figure of 61 votes difference between Beekman and Thayer is as reported in Burton W. Onstine, Oregon Votes.

38. Beekman to Thayer, 20 June 1878, letter press copy in Beekman papers, OHS MS 916, Box J.
39. Beekman papers, OHS MS 916, Box 15.
40. Ibid.
41. The contract, dated 27 June 1858, is in Beekman papers, OHS MS 916, Box 10. Tri-weekly service between Yreka and Jacksonville by the California Stage Co. was announced in the Yreka Union, 25 March 1858, as quoted in Boggs, p. 301.
42. Undated clipping probably from the Medford Mail Tribune, reprinting an article by Fred Lockley for the Oregon Journal, in SOHS clipping files, Beekman family.
43. C. C. Beekman to J. T. Raplee, 20 Feb. 1865, Beekman papers, OHS MS 916, Box J.
44. Burrell, pp. 219-221. Burrell cites an H. Wadsworth; my reading of it is E. Wadsworth.
45. Fletcher Linn, "Reminiscences," SOHS unarranged MS.
46. Records of Beekman's land dealings are in Beekman papers, OHS MS 916, Boxes 2 and 16-19. One of Beekman's most controversial land transactions involved the establishment of the townsite of Medford, which was platted by Beekman and three other landholders. Town gossip held that Beekman had refused to assist the Oregon & California Railroad to place its line through Jacksonville because he intended to profit from its route through Medford. A short account of this episode is in Frank Haines, Jr., Jacksonville, p. 100.
47. Oregon Sentinel, 16 Jan. and 20 Feb. 1875; Oregon Sentinel, 3 Apr. and 25 Dec. 1878; Beekman papers, UO MS Ax10 and OHS MS 916, Box K.
48. Colvig, "Clowns is People," SOHS MS 9, p. 15.
49. Linn, "Reminiscences," SOHS unarranged MS.
50. Downs, p. 5; Lockley, undated clipping in SOHS clipping files, Beekman family. Downs cites 1873, 1893, and 1907; Lockley, 1873 and 1893.
51. Burrell, p. 224.
52. Southern Oregon Pioneer Association, SOHS unarranged MS.
53. Fred Lockley in Oregon Journal, 6 Oct. 1912.
54. As note 24.

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